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SUBJECT: TOGO FLOODING: SITUATION IN THE SOUTH

REF: LOME 397

¶1. Summary. During travels around the southernmost portion of Togo over the week-end, it was clear that water levels are declining (except as water rushes toward the mouth of the Zio River at the ocean). The land is beginning to dry out, with deep mud the rule. Rains in the south have become spottier or absent. Agencies have been trying to assist those displaced by the flooding, bringing in food to people sheltering in schools and handing out supplies, though more of the latter are badly needed, particularly mosquito nets. End Summary.

¶2. Almost all of the eastern side of the city of Lome has been affected by the flooding since it began July 30. Even though the northeasternmost quarter, Kegue, is some 6-7 kms. from the Zio River, water levels remained too high to travel very far, and the same was true in other neighborhoods in this very flat area as one moved toward the Atlantic. Close to the ocean along the edge of the suburbs and neighboring villages from Lome toward the Beninese border, water has invariably flooded those areas closest to the Zio.

¶3. Many residents in the affected areas have moved into local schools, others staying with neighbors living on higher ground. A consistent complaint has been the amount of theft occurring in unoccupied homes at night, even to the point where the metal roofing and window frames are being removed. We encountered one woman in the neighborhood of Adakpame who had just waded through the water to her home to discover that all her corn -- the staple food of southern Togo -- had been stolen, and she wailed as she held up her empty basin.

¶4. The good news is that, at least in the greater Lome area, services are being provided to the internally displaced people (IDPs). We generally found government health and social welfare personnel, as well as Togolese Red Cross representatives and police and/or gendarmes at IDP locations, though services were slower in getting organized as one moved away from Lome and closer to the Beninese border, a situation we were told would be remedied August 4. Health cadres were concerned over the number of people turning up with malaria, diarrhea, and parasites, as well as the poor to no drinking water available and the poor to nonexistent latrines. Social welfare cadre were trucking food in for people to eat and distributing a few very basic necessities. The Red Cross was responsible for counting the IDPs and for assisting the most vulnerable. Particularly impressive was a large IDP center of 2,500 people (and growing) from six villages east of Lome in Baguida, where services were humming, the gendarmes having brought in both a large tank of drinking water and a mobile dispensary in addition to the local health service facilities, and social welfare providing meals.

¶5. With stagnant water lying around close to all the IDP centers, a common complaint was of the mosquito population and the need for mosquito nets. More supplies of sleeping

mats and other basics are needed urgently.

¶6. We also traveled virtually across Togo from near the border with Benin westward through the medium-sized town of Tsevie, some 35 kms. north of Lome on the north-south highway and widely said in Lome to be completely cut off from the world, to the town of Keve close to Ghana. This entailed crossing both the swollen rivers responsible for the flooding, the Haho on the eastern side and the Zio on the western. Bridges over both were intact, and water was clearly going down on the rivers. Roads, though badly rutted, were beginning to dry out, and traffic was moving on them.

¶7. There has clearly been crop damage in the areas we visited, both around Lome and up country. How much it will affect the food supply is uncertain, though prices have definitely been rising. One group of farmers 20 kms. west of Tsevie whose farms are close to the Zio said their fields had been covered by water higher than a nearby tree in mid-week. As of August 2, they were still in a meter of water. The farmers saw no hope for their crops of corn and manioc, though they thought they could replant corn during the small rains that should arrive in another 45 days or so. We were sceptical of the claim of water having been so high until traveling past the Zio and seeing fields well up on high banks completely swept by the current and still standing in water.

¶8. Comment. Services to IDPs in the Lome area are being provided surprisingly well, and improving. Many more basic supplies are needed, and the Embassy is submitting a disaster declaration (septel) to help pay for them. Authorities are announcing that people in other, more remote areas farther inland are now also receiving attention. Humanitarian needs appear to be receiving just priority as the GOT wrestles with the more difficult problem of how to replace or repair Togo's affected bridges.

TWINING